

Performing television history

Article

Accepted Version

Bignell, J. (2018) Performing television history. *Critical Studies in Television: The International Journal of Television Studies*, 13 (3). pp. 262-279. ISSN 1749-6039 doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1749602018782860> Available at <https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/77143/>

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work. See [Guidance on citing](#).

To link to this article DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1749602018782860>

Publisher: Sage

All outputs in CentAUR are protected by Intellectual Property Rights law, including copyright law. Copyright and IPR is retained by the creators or other copyright holders. Terms and conditions for use of this material are defined in the [End User Agreement](#).

www.reading.ac.uk/centaur

CentAUR

Central Archive at the University of Reading

Reading's research outputs online

NOTE: This is the Accepted Version, reprinted by permission of SAGE Publications, of an article for *Critical Studies in Television*, vol. 13, no. 3 (September 2018), in a Special Issue on acting on television edited by Stephen Lacey and Simone Knox.

Performing television history

Jonathan Bignell, University of Reading

Abstract

An expanded conception of performance study can disturb current theoretical and historical assumptions about television's medial identity. The article considers how to write histories of the dominant forms and assumptions about performance in British and American television drama, and analyses how acting is situated in relation to the multiple meaning-making components of television. A longitudinal, wide-ranging analysis is briefly sketched to show that the concept of performance, from acting to the display of television's mediating capability, can extend to the analysis of how the television medium 'performed' its own identity to shape its distinctiveness in specific historical circumstances.

Keywords

Performance, drama, history, medium, technology, broadcasting, Britain, USA

This article aims to disturb current theoretical and historical assumptions and suggest new directions for historically informed performance studies in television. It considers how to write a history of the dominant forms and assumptions about performance in British and American television drama. This means thinking about how acting has worked in relation to the many other meaning-making components of television. Actors are crucial to very many television performances but the concept of performance refers also to the work of non-professionals on-screen, and the aspects of style and mise-en-scene that frame how dramatic

storytelling is carried out. This study identifies how performance has been enabled and constrained in specific ways in the history of television, from its constitution in the 1930s up to the present, and how it has been deployed in discourses used by television professionals, critical commentators and audiences. The analysis prioritizes scripted drama programmes, both live and recorded, but also takes account of more broadly-conceived performance events. Original work on written archive sources, audio-visual records and critical evaluation of scholarship in this article aims to demonstrate that there is a demand for new multi-focused methodologies for the analysis of performance. A longitudinal, wide-ranging analysis such as is briefly sketched in this article can show how the television medium was ‘performing’ its own identity in relation to other mediums.

Historically informed study of the dominant forms and assumptions about performance in British and American television drama needs to go beyond the recent and important scholarship on actors and acting in television programmes, to offer new ways of writing the histories of television drama. Within television, it is evident that acting takes similar but also some contrasting forms across programme genres, places of production and technologies of programme-making (Cantrell and Hogg, 2016). Inasmuch as television drama is a form of labour, carried out by individuals with their own aims, ideological assumptions and expectations about what drama might be (and might not be), research needs to assess the attitudes and responses to acting on the part of television programme makers and performers (Pearson, 2010), and also evaluate how audiences have drawn on ideas about dramatic and non-dramatic performance to negotiate their relationships with programmes. Programme-makers have produced drama by developing forms believed appropriate to the medium, but often by adopting texts, formats and personnel from outside it, so the analysis has to ask how have television performance has differences from, and similarities to, theatre, radio

broadcasting and cinema performances. The study of television performance is the royal road to the understanding of how television performs its own identity.

Performing an identity implies that understandings of what television is are produced contingently and in process by means of citation and iteration. The theoretical conception of identity as performance used here derives from Judith Butler's (1993) work on gender as a perpetually renewed and unstable way of being. Similarly, television has no necessary form but is made by the temporary establishment of boundaries, perpetually shifting, between its comparator mediums and its own histories and imagined futures. So, for example, in its early years, as William Uricchio (2008) shows, television was close to broadcast radio because of liveness and relay. By contrast, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, it seems close to cinema and the internet because of the cross-platform production of textual commodities and the creation of interactive means of engagement with programmes, experiences and brands. If identity is built out of the iterations of how that identity is performed, the process of identity formation must be continuous and necessary. So, it would be possible to investigate any particular instance of television to see how it shapes and responds to ideas of what the medium might be. However, not all performances are equal, so choices of examples become important. In the study of television performance there is a temptation to adopt an evolutionary narrative that assumes teleological progress towards 'authenticity', yet that concept is contested within and between fictional and factual forms, and changes over time. In framing this article as a chronological study for the sake of brevity and coherence, it tells a sequential story that in its subsequent elaboration will need to deconstruct notions of causality, punctual turning-points and 'great men' discourses and be grounded in more detailed analysis of evidence in its specificity. In some instances, the distinctions between mediums thought to be contiguous, such as radio, theatre and cinema, are especially clear or, conversely, difficult to establish. In the remainder of the article a

variety of moments is chosen to work through such issues around television's distinctiveness, self-sufficiency or dependence.

Preparing the ground

Performance is a continuum of activity that encompasses dramatic forms in television, theatre, cinema and visual art, but which also includes acts of everyday, social behaviour (Allain and Harvie, 2006). The social anthropologist Erving Goffman (1959) described social interaction and role-play as performance, and theatre theorist Richard Schechner (2002) created the discipline of Performance Studies to focus on practices that could include not only what actors do but also those public presentations mediated by television, like sport, religious ceremonies or political events. Philosophical work by Judith Butler addressed the ways that subjective identity is constituted in and by performance, and Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006) identifies performance as constituted by an interaction between event and viewer. These differing approaches show that studies of television performance need to expand their notion of what constitutes performance, beyond the topic of acting, but maintain rigour in addressing questions of medium specificity by historicising them. Performance for television changed diachronically, and also synchronically in relation to cultural value and canonicity.

The fact of television's framed image has led to cinema being an obvious comparator as far as performance is concerned (Baron et al, 2004), although this can centre attention on stardom and the related but distinct topic of television celebrities or personalities, and their relationship with directorial artistry, at the expense of television's greater breadth of genres and modes of address (Butler, 1991). Moreover, a focus on acting alone, such as in Alan Lovell and Peter Kramer's collection (1999) has underplayed television performance in comparison to cinema until Christine Cornea's (2010) recent collection on the subject. That has led to a wave of new scholarship exemplified by new work such as Richard Hewett's

(2017) on acting in science fiction television, and Cantrell and Hogg's interviews with actors (2017) and collection of essays (2018). Television performance is a topic of intense interest at present, in which acting is being used as a key to questions of medium specificity.

To avoid the twin pitfalls of generalizing assertion about what makes television distinct as a medium and dissolution of its distinctiveness into a proliferation of particular case studies the approach to the performance of television must be primarily historiographic. The evidence for performance histories in British and American television is uneven in availability, but extensive in volume. For example, the BBC Written Archives Centre holds paper files on all BBC activity since its inception in 1922, enabling access to records of television (and radio) programme policy and production, including records of how actors were recruited and deployed in programmes and how television adopted texts such as films and plays, and forms such as variety performance and soap opera that already existed. Files on individual programmes preserve some of the comments made to Audience Research department staff about actors and other performers, and the attitudes to performers and performances held by programme makers and management. Independent television broadcasters have much sparser and more dispersed archives, but specific records relate to, for example, management decisions relating to performance such as responses to complaints and public controversies around individuals in programmes. In the USA, the Special Collections department at the University of California, Los Angeles, for example, holds papers acquired from American television producers, directors and designers, and the programme publicity staff at the CBS network, and many of these records illuminate how programmes deployed performers during production, and subsequently in programme marketing.

Audio-visual and photographic collections (for example, at the British Film Institute or the University of Wisconsin-Madison) facilitate viewing programmes and, equally

importantly, photographic stills, press clippings and ephemera related to individual performers, as well as papers from drama producers, directors and studio executives. Specialist collections (e.g. The Paley Centre, New York) hold hundreds of television commercials, whose performance conventions are fascinating to compare and contrast to those of the scripted dramas into which they were inserted. Key paratextual material includes the publications controlled by television broadcasters, notably the magazines *Radio Times* and *TV Times* in Britain, and *TV Guide* in the USA, which, as well as listing programmes in the broadcast schedule, also promoted programmes in journalistic feature articles that were often organised around performers and performances. By adopting practices and methodologies that can address these different kinds of sources, a sense of performance as multimedia, intermedial, textual and paratextual can be built up, sensitive to historical contexts and specificities of place.

Television dramatic fiction took shape from the interactions of institutions, technologies, personnel, genres and forms, and out of the cultural ideologies shaping subjectivity and identity. The projects to address performance thus connect with existing work on television's cultural history, such as John Caughie's (2000) study of naturalism and modernism in British television drama, but places performance at the centre of the analysis in a new way. Starting in the 1930s, the medium's emergent forms of performance were in dialogue with existing media like theatre, radio and cinema, and non-scripted performance like music-hall (vaudeville). On 6 November 1936 between 3.35 and 4.00 pm, for example, scenes from the Royalty Theatre's production of the comedy *Marigold* were broadcast from Alexandra Palace studio in the first episode of the series *Theatre Parade*. Changing cultural forms drew on ideas about television's specificity as a medium as that medium became institutionally stable from the 1930s. Camera and TV set technologies encouraged relatively high-contrast image compositions and long takes, and this led to some dramas adopting the

graphical, geometric design principles of Art Deco. For example, the Constructivist set in Capek's *Rossum's Universal Robots* (1938) matched the aesthetic of the wooden cabinets that would have been housing the television screen. Questions of design and technology and their relationship with performance complicate the assumption that early television drama was poorly-transposed theatre. As early as 1937, on 24 February BBC broadcast a discussion between the artist John Piper and Robert Medley, *Modern Art in Stage Design*; the relationship between acting and mise-en-scene was a topic of interest. Television adopted other kinds of non-scripted performance too, such as fashion shows and ballet. For example, a sequence of programmes on 18 August 1946 began with a performance of *Les Sylphides* by the visiting Ballet Theatre of New York, followed by a discussion presented as a 'ballet party', and then a one-act ballet, *On Stage*, a backstage story of a girl encouraged by a stagehand to realise her dreams of joining the corps de ballet (Anon., 1947). This sequence was not simply a varied evening of entertainment but also a meditation on the boundaries between audience and performance, onlookers and participants, and how television made different kinds of spectatorial relationship possible. Television selected and claimed more and less formal kinds of performances and changed both the performance events and audiences' relationship with them (Scannell, 1990: 16). Moreover, members of the public could sometimes see television happening, being present to see behind the scenes. Performance is usually dependent on the audience's distance from it, but members of the public could appear as guests or contestants, or simply be invited to feel as if they were in the audience of a live show.

Broadcasting performance

Overlapping, intersecting kinds of history (Ellis, 2014) are evident in the 'golden age' of the 1950s-1960s in Britain and the USA, precisely the moment when television came to the fore

as the dominant domestic broadcast medium. Important changes affecting television performance in the period include the shift from live broadcasting to recording on film or videotape, and the introduction of colour pictures and stereo sound. These changes affected how actors and performances were assimilated into production schedules and practices, repeating passages of action and recording out of script sequence, for example, and giving greater prominence to costume and 'authentic' location sound. Studios moved from being the normal place for making drama (from the 1930s to the 1960s) to being a space used for 'theatrical' types of drama (literary adaptation, opera, drama in non-realistic settings such as science fiction, or low-budget soap melodrama). For the actor, studio drama was closer to theatre because of the relatively long tranches of performance time, whereas complex set-ups on location required segmentation of the actor's performance. Moreover, the kind of space in which production took place would change the relationship between actor and other elements of mise-en-scene, notably setting, props and sound.

In Britain and the USA in the 1940s and 1950s, drama was normally shot live, as a continuous performance, by electronic cameras in a multi-camera studio. Pictures were mixed live in the studio gallery and broadcast nationally, so performances required intense concentration and coordination between actors and the production crew. When videotape began to allow pre-recording in the later 1950s it was only used for lower-budget drama such as soap opera or situation comedy. Moreover, videotape was expensive to buy and store, editing was cumbersome and required the physical cutting of the tape so wherever possible drama was still shot in long takes 'as-if live'. Performance was a key attraction of the high-profile prime-time drama anthologies like *The US Steel Hour* (1953-63) or *Kraft Television Theatre* (1947-58). The three-camera space could be used frontally (end-on), but more usually in a group of adjacent mini-sets within one studio space into which the cameras could move, shooting in long sequences as-if-live. This form of performance suited the television

drama anthology series like *Philco/Goodyear Television Playhouse* (1948-55) or *Westinghouse Studio One* (1948-58) that drew on producers as well as writers and performers from theatre, mainly located in New York. The expansion of broadcast hours and the number of available channels in the 1950s and 1960s made it possible for the professional television dramatist to emerge, alongside institutional structures for script development, casting, and marketing and merchandising that all depend in different ways upon performances. The increasing prominence of the performer, as a node around which the meanings of programmes can be organised, led to important distinctions between terms like ‘star’, ‘celebrity’ and ‘personality’ over time and between mediums.

A study of production papers, photographic stills and floor-plans can be used for an analysis of the CBS/NBC drama series *Lux Video Theatre* (1950-59) and its production of British dramatist Terence Rattigan’s *The Browning Version* in 1955. This adaptation of a theatre play (in London’s West End in 1948 and on Broadway in 1949), also adapted for cinema (1951), was introduced for the television audience by the British-born Hollywood actor James Mason, from a set representing a book-lined study, and after the live television performance he interviewed the star actors. Herbert Marshall played the protagonist, the schoolteacher Andrew Crocker-Harris who is about to retire from his job and be replaced by Mr Gilbert (Rod Taylor, working in television before his cinema breakthrough in *The Time Machine* (1960)). Judith Evelyn played Crocker-Harris’s wife who was having an affair with another teacher. The programme was sponsored by Lux soap, a brand that associated itself with star film actresses in print advertising, and in the same studio as Mason’s ‘study’ and the *Browning Version* set, there was a set representing a woman’s bedroom. One camera shot a model at a dressing table, smoothing Lux soap onto her cheek, in a live commercial for the show’s sponsor.

This performance is a document of intersecting histories. There are at least four kinds of performance: Mason as host, the performance of the play, the Lux commercial and the actors as Mason's interviewees. All of the performances were live, not recorded, so histories of television technology and assumptions about television as an ephemeral medium are also in play. Both the drama and its performers combined British and American cultures of drama and acting, at a time when psychological styles of performance (such as The Method in America) were diverging from the 'British school' of text-based acting. The drama was a commercially sponsored entertainment that aimed to signify sophistication, so issues of cultural value and genre are also important to its meaning. There were many links with cinema (Mason as film star, and to a lesser extent Judith Evelyn who had appeared in a minor role in Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954) the year before) but also theatre via Rattigan's play and live performances by the actors that evening, and radio; the series was a transfer of *Lux Radio Theatre* to television. The programme shows how the television medium was 'performing' its own identity as a medium in relation to other mediums.

US drama production shifted in the 1950s from live studio drama to filmed drama shot out of story sequence (Kepley and Boddy, 1980). A one-hour drama would be allowed two days for rehearsal, initially running dialogue and then blocking physical moves, before the shooting period of three days. Performances could be repeated if mistakes occurred during shooting, exterior scenes could be shot on location and inserted into studio footage, and the actors' performances could be circulated and repeated for years in a newly created syndication market (Hawes, 2002). A professional culture included performers and producers working across television and cinema. Segmented shooting of separate takes, as in production for Hollywood cinema, was most efficiently carried out with consistent characters, settings and visual design in series running for up to 39 episodes. For example, the production company Desilu made the outstandingly successful sitcom *I Love Lucy* (1951-57), based

around the performances of Lucille Ball, drawing on vaudeville routines but with dramatic narratives in each episode. The series was made on film for the CBS network in Hollywood, pre-empting the entry of the major film studios into the television business by four years. Desilu and other small companies made pilots to sell to the Hollywood studios for television production, as part of a much larger move of television production from New York to Los Angeles, and from live multi-camera broadcasting to production on film. Twentieth Century Fox, Columbia Screen Gems, MCA Universal, MGM, Paramount and Warner Brothers were making 40% of network programmes by 1960 (Hilmes, 1990). The networks followed a strategy of vertical integration, purchasing film studios so that by 1964, they had ownership of or had acquired rights in 93% of all prime-time programmes that they showed (MacDonald, 1990: 147). The networks also controlled distribution, and owned about 200 television stations in major cities, each filling about 60% of their broadcast time with network-originated programmes (Brown, 1998: 147). However, the intense competition between the three networks for the mass audience led to a struggle for the middle ground and a tendency towards conservatism and aversion to risk. This provided opportunities for the smaller independent producers to focus on distinctiveness in their programme offerings to the networks, as long as they were good prospects of attracting audiences. Performers and performances were among the weapons used by each side in the struggle for dominance.

The performance style of popular series can be mapped in relation to genre, but actors' approaches to character are linked to discourses of authenticity that changed over time. British performance has been perceived as nuanced and literary, while American performance has seemed direct and physical; each adjective has both positive and negative connotations in different times and places. A comparative approach to the histories of television performance in Britain and the USA can address two related but distinct television traditions, with long-standing links but a history of mutual repudiation (Hilmes, 2011). For

example, Stanislavskian discourses around motivation, and the requirement for internal causative psychology that should drive choices of outward expression were fundamental to performance training in the Actors Studio, which, like most television production, moved to California and adapted to a cinema tradition. On the other hand, ‘relevance’ meant a zero degree style of performance in ‘social drama’ or ‘kitchen sink’, embedding performance in documentation of place, people and temporality (*East Side / West Side* 1964, *Cathy Come Home* 1966). Particular styles of performance relate to genre conventions, which themselves have histories that cross the boundaries of medium and nation.

British and American police and thriller dramas, among other popular performances, became genres in which completed programmes were exported to the UK from the USA and some programme formats were exchanged between nations. Filmed television drama, shot out of sequence and assembled in post-production, required a different kind of performance work from actors as compared to live or as-if live multi-camera performance shot in sequence in the studio. In addition, it required different skills and professional training for its production staff. US filmed series were internationally traded in the 1950s, changing audience expectations of drama towards shooting in actual locations and with rapid changes of shot and scene. But British channels were limited to using imports for no more than 14% of screen time, so this stimulated the growth of a British filmed television production base that could draw on the personnel and resources available because of the collapse of the ‘B feature’ cinema industry (Chibnall and McFarlane, 2009). There were also actors and production staff from the US and Canada who had come to the UK. Thus, British filmed television could take the place of imported US series, in terms of genre and performance style, and early examples included *Fabian of Scotland Yard* (1954-56), the first British series to be wholly shot on film and subsequently extracts were repurposed for two cinema films. The imported but British-set thriller series *Saber of London* (1954-59) was followed by *The*

Man from Interpol (1960), thirty-minute filmed series made in the same way as low-budget B films by production teams accustomed to working in cinema. Hannah Weinstein, a US producer who would later collaborate with the ITV impresario Lew Grade to make adventure series for export to the USA (Neale, 2005), first worked in Britain on the filmed television police drama *Colonel March of Scotland Yard* (1952). She cast the US film star Boris Karloff, whose three pilot episodes were edited into the cinema film of *Colonel March Investigates* (1953), leading to the subsequent television series syndicated in the USA in 1954-55 and broadcast by ITV in 1955. This period in the late 1950s and early 1960s was marked by the interchange between cinema and television behind and in front of the camera, and by the emergence of a transatlantic culture of fictions blending action, thriller, police, detective and spy drama for both the cinema and television screens. Television and cinema, different and convergent, found ways of performing their identities as separate and connected mediums in ways that suited both British and US broadcasting cultures.

Later in the 1960s filmed television developed into fantasy and science fiction series such as *Adam Adamant Lives!* (1966-67) and *The Prisoner* (1967-68). The British action-adventure series *The Avengers* (1961-69), shifted from a relatively sober espionage thriller shot in black and white as-if live (Seasons 1-4) to later colour episodes (Seasons 5-7) with increasingly science-fictional and fantasy storylines that reflexively commented on a cycle of British-made and then US-made spy adventure. On US television, *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* (1964-68) and *Get Smart* (1965-70), for example, introduced fantasy elements and slapstick humour respectively. The perpetual adjustment of the relationship between cinema and television meant that performance styles linked and separated themselves. Spy adventure series borrowed the conventions of the James Bond films from 1962, but, as Rick Worland (1994) has noted, their popularity in both the UK and USA meant that the form's conventions for acting and performance were already being ironized and undercut by 1965-66. For

example, Diana Rigg's acting in the role of Mrs Peel in *The Avengers* acceded to objectification by a masculine gaze, but the performance of 'liberated' sexuality also ironized masculine dominance.

Theatre adaptations claimed television's associations with live, continuous performance and elite metropolitan culture for high-profile evening viewing, such as in the anthologies *World Television Theatre* (1957-59), *Play of the Month* (1965-83) and *Theatre Night* (1985-90). Viewers expected difficult language and restricted staging, but especially they valued great acting. Although the social realist drama strands of *Armchair Theatre* (1956-74), *The Wednesday Play* (1964-70) and *Play for Today* (1970-84), for example, made use of unknown actors to perform in dramas that eschewed 'theatricality' in favour of 'relevance' and 'contemporaneity', the great majority of the broadcasts were not documentary-style, filmed dramas but studio-shot domestic stories that drew on the talents of acknowledged actors. Moreover, the apparent slice-of-life style was itself a performance of television's engagement with contemporary social problems and served as a claim for the medium's role to document and stimulate debate and change (Bignell, 2014). Style functioned as a performance of medial identity.

In long-running series and serial drama, lead actors created roles that persisted for years, building the characters and stimulating the commissioning of spin-offs, prequels and specials. Stable formats dominated established conventional genres, as in the case of *Coronation Street* (1960-) for UK soap opera, *Z Cars* (1962-78) for the police series, or *Doctor Who* (1963-89) for science fiction. Similar US examples, including some genres associated very closely with US culture and not British culture, included the Western *Bonanza* (1959-73), the hospital soap *General Hospital* (1963-), and the exotic detective drama *Hawaii Five-O* (1968-80). Despite a focus on national contexts in both television institutions and academic historiography, performance is significant to transnational

television and the self-understandings of national dramatic cultures, because of programme trading and the presence in the schedule, adjacent to each other, of programmes from different television cultures.

Genre hybridity

From the late 1970s to the 1990s, performance and genre changed in relation to material embodiment. Institutional histories of this period stress the impact of inflation on drama production costs, the move toward the break-up of network control over television in the USA and the perceived stagnation preceding the start of Channel 4 in Britain, and deregulation on both sides of the Atlantic. Escalation of production cost for scripted drama led to aversion to risk, and the need to fund programmes from co-production and export reduced the scope for new authored work. In this context, actors became key assets that promised textual and economic stability, seen in the reliance on costly stars for whom drama vehicles were created (especially on ITV). The alternative strategy was to cast ensembles of relatively unknown performers and build drama on the relationships amongst them and between the characters and a specific milieu. In the USA, Steven Bochco, the screenwriter and creator of the ensemble police drama *Hill Street Blues* (1981-87) drew deliberately on this kind of performance.

Bochco appointed Robert Butler as the director for the pilot and the first four episodes of the series, knowing of Butler's history of working with actors in live television on *Playhouse 90* (1956-61) and with Peter Falk and the many high-profile film stars guesting on *Columbo* (1971-2003) where Bochco had started his own career (Gitlin, 1983: 290). Butler shot *Hill Street Blues* episodes in blocks of four so that the actors and production team would stay in each location or studio set-up for a longer time, allowing more rehearsal time and the interactions necessary to create an ensemble. Performance was also controlled to forge a

hybrid of comedy and realism in the series using characters flexibly in both long-running and episode-specific storylines. However, the size of the cast and thus the time to shoot made *Hill Street Blues* too expensive for MTM to sustain (Marc and Thompson, 1995: 225). Bochco continued this practice subsequently, however, in *NYPD Blue* (1993-2006), but with fewer continuing roles and a focus on the richly detailed facial expressiveness and physical gesture used by Dennis Franz (Lt. Andy Sipowicz) to convey moral and emotional turmoil. Studio sets were designed to be relatively realistic spaces (rooms had ceilings, for example) and the actors would perform scenes in long takes, something like the as-if live recording of fifty years earlier, to enable actors' continuity of performance (Milch and Clark, 1996).

Responses to perceived crisis increased the importance of generic and technological experimentation in the period, each of which affected acting, its relationship with performance and the shaping of expectations for what television drama might be. The production technology of Outside Broadcast video, initially used for sports coverage, made multi-camera location shooting on video possible for drama series. The BBC's post-apocalyptic serial *Survivors* (1975-77), therefore, moved from the pre-filmed exteriors and studio-shot video interiors of its first series to multi-camera video for all of its scenes. The serial featured an ensemble cast in consistent rural locations, and OB video could create an everyday, seamless performance embedded in very tangible, consistent sense of place. This contrasted with the wholly filmed, location-shot drama adaptation *Brideshead Revisited* (1981), made, like cinema, in separate shots that had to be individually lit and set up while actors waited for their moment in front of the camera. By contrast, the wearable camera mounting, Steadicam, can follow an actor through space, pan smoothly around a performance space and use long takes to produce intense scrutiny of action and setting. The director Alan Clarke, in *Made in Britain* (1983) for example, used the technology to follow the very physical, gestural aggression of the lead character Trevor (Tim Roth) as he wandered the

streets. In relation to technology, archival documents on visual effects demonstrate that the status of performance changed in relation to working practices for performers when the emergence of digital technologies made it possible to insert and superimpose separately shot sequences into the same finished image. Performers' work formed only one aspect of a text composed from many different visual and sound components that were recorded at different times and in different locations. Thus, industrial and technological practices impacted aesthetically on claims for 'authenticity', for example.

Scripted programmes replayed historical fact-based material, adding narrative and characterisation to documentary subjects (Paget, 2011). In the US, a melodramatic mode of performance became associated with lifestyle channels such as Lifetime and the daytime scheduling of single television films telling a chronological story organised around a suffering female protagonist. This drama mode, the problem-of-the-week TV movie, drew storylines from real events and targets a largely female audience with performances of emotional suffering, resilience and affirmation. British fact-based drama focused on figures from British politics, sport and entertainment such as *The Special Relationship* (2010) in which Michael Sheen played Prime Minister Tony Blair with Dennis Quaid as US President Bill Clinton. Actors' performances made links with real people's media representations, drawing on television's claim for denotation of the real and the generic expectations of television news and current affairs to document public life. Audience recognition of the subjects of the dramatizations supports their marketing and promotion, and in some cases like *The Special Relationship* builds exportability by featuring events and people of supra-national significance.

More recently, there has been a cycle of dramas in which performers perform the off-screen lives of earlier performers. BBC broadcast *Kenneth Williams: Fantabulosa!* in 2006, about the troubled life of the eponymous raconteur, panel-show contestant and comic actor in

television sitcoms and the *Carry On* film series Kenneth Williams. Further dramas about television stars followed in 2008 under the anthology title *The Curse of Comedy*, about British entertainment personalities from the 1960s and 1970s. So, *The Curse of Steptoe* centred on the relationship between the actors in the sitcom *Steptoe and Son* (1962-74), while others named their celebrity in the title such as *Frankie Howerd: Rather You Than Me* and *Hughie Green Most Sincerely*. *Hancock & Joan* dramatized the relationship between the radio and television comedian Tony Hancock and his wife. Performances representing well-known figures with long television careers necessarily engage with strategies for impersonation via speech, mannerism and physicality, re-presenting the familiar but offering the psychological insight that extended dramatic fiction over an hour or more of screen-time can provide. At a time when the death of television was being proclaimed as technological convergence, interactivity and new patterns of viewer engagement emerged, performance of the past, including performing television's history of performers and performances, framed television historically in narratives that implied both continuity and rupture.

This was also the period of the rise of Reality TV and factual entertainment formats such as the docusoap. There were shrinking audiences for current affairs and investigative documentary, and documentary and factual series deployed performance by non-actors as a key aspect of their appeal to viewers. Formats grew out of daytime programming and then displaced documentary, popular drama and light entertainment from evening schedules. 'Ordinary' people were recurring characters, sometimes becoming celebrity performers (Dovey, 2000). Formats adopted soap opera conventions, with parallel storylines, music, serial narratives and episode cliffhangers. Game-docs and contests like *Big Brother* (2000-) placed ordinary people in an extraordinary situation, combining the social experiment documentary and the game show (Nichols, 1994). Devised situations required participants to perform identities, whether to establish themselves in unfamiliar surroundings on *Big*

Brother, or literally to perform an entertainment routine in *Britain's Got Talent* (2007-) and often a persona designed to enlist audience support in public voting. The performance of identity, and the testing of its authenticity and effectiveness, discipline and evaluate social identities by means of tests and transformations (Wood and Skeggs, 2011). Role-playing could imply either the perfectibility of the self as a project of making-over through performance (Mosely, 2000) or a practice that could police class and other social divisions as an aspect of the governance of society (Palmer, 2003). Police perform relationships between law enforcement and offenders in, nannies negotiate how to interact with unruly children and dysfunctional parents in *Supernanny* (2004-12) or aspiring business leaders wrangle their teams in *The Apprentice* (2004-17), for example, in performances that dramatise deviance from norms of taste and social behaviour.

Participants are cast because they are dramatically interesting characters, interacting in specific locations like Newcastle (*Geordie Shore*, 2011-) or the Liverpool (*Desperate Scousewives* 2011-12). *The Only Way is Essex* (2010-) production company Lime Pictures cast the series from respondents to advertising on Facebook and local media (Raeside, 2011), and those who were chosen had auditioned for other reality shows in the hope of becoming celebrities. Storyline producers sought out dramatic arcs for the participants, using gossip and intrigue as in Lime Pictures' soap opera *Hollyoaks* (1995-). The story producer, Daran Little, also worked on *Made in Chelsea* (2011-), and had been a screenwriter for the US soap *All My Children* (1970-2013) and *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders* (1985-) in the UK.

Characterisations invite viewers to assess the participants' performances and evaluate them. What distinguishes the performance of Reality TV participants from actors is that they lack an actor's training in creating character; 'tension is created between the glossy "drama" aesthetic and the British casts' inability to convincingly perform their everyday life. This tension creates a tone of cringing comedy familiar from British sitcoms, disrupting the

emotional investment encouraged by the melodramatic content and offering the British youth television audience a detached viewing position that flatters their genre literacy' (Woods, 2012: 5). Performances often include moments of inauthenticity, so that as Tony Wood, creative director of Lime Pictures, said of *The Only Way is Essex*, 'At the heart of this was always a desire to put in the audience's mind: "Is it real? Are they acting? Is it scripted? Is it not?" and to leave that as an open question for them' (in Raeside, 2011: 8). Mise-en-scène and narrative derive from television fiction, at the same time as documentary-style hand-held camera and apparently unrehearsed performance connotes authenticity. This textual dissonance is itself potentially reflexive about the conventions of performance adopted in the blended genres of Reality TV.

Reaping the rewards

Television is expected to be denotative, demonstrative and observational, befitting its history as a live medium of relay that seems to transparently window events or performances. When it does more than this, by emphasising the pleasures of its visual and aural textures, movements and effects, analytical discourse reaches for other terms, like 'cinematic'. As Brett Mills (2013) has argued, analytical discourses about television become blunted when programmes appear to refuse to fit into the moulds that expectations of the medium lay out for them. But television performs itself by the concatenation of human labour and physical objects. Its two-dimension images set up - 'frame' - the relationship between the audience and performance, as a relationship in which meaning is actively made by the spectator. Umberto Eco (1977) developed the concept of ostension, exploring how performance puts something on view for a spectator. Ostension shows, selects and puts into an arrangement. It sets performance into particular social and cultural codes, and invites the audience to participate in the creation of symbolic or metaphorical significance. Television comes full

circle, from the 1930s when its capabilities were being advertised at the great Radiolympia exhibitions to the 2012 Olympics with huge outdoor screens (Wheatley, 2016: 23-25, 225-231). These events are not mainly about what can be seen but how seeing becomes self-consciously spectacular.

Television now has a relatively long history, so studies of programmes need to consider the material from which the text was made. A choice of lens, a colour of light, the design of a model or the texture of a costume may in themselves be minor instruments in the overall orchestration of the piece, but each is a thing in itself that has a provenance and a contribution to make when they arrive together in the moment, aiming towards the completion of the programme. Completion used to be synonymous with transmission, but more recently the role of the programme to create the relation between text and audience can take place at another time and be repeated. Thus, the same programme can perform differently at different times and in different places, as the relationships between text, audience and reception context change. Media convergence means that digital production, exhibition and consumption allow texts and users to migrate from screen to screen.

Having massively stimulated the creation of performances, their broadcast to mass, often enthusiastic audiences and the extension of performance across the genres and formats of an increasingly diverse and continuous medial territory, television has handed on its riches to its inheritors. Television performance is a harvest for the world, that paradoxically heralds the necessity for the medium to combat its own perceived impoverishment brought about by technological convergence. The attractions of embodied presence, which are essential to television as it thinks itself into being, have been shared and handed over, but this does not mean the end of television but instead that other media have become television too. For example, online video genres apparently alien to television are in fact its inheritors if not its successors. As Henry Jenkins (2006: 11) pointed out, participation culture is neither

monolithic nor teleological, being characterised by ‘tactical decisions and unintended consequences, mixed signals and competing interests, and most of all, unclear directions and unpredictable outcomes’. Research into performance needs to identify ways in which it has been enabled and constrained in specific ways in the history of television from its constitution in the 1930s up to the present, and how it has been deployed in discourses used by television professionals (including performers), critical commentators and audiences. The scope of this endeavour is huge, which is why this article prioritises only a limited range of scripted drama programmes, both live and recorded, but also takes some limited account of more broadly-conceived performance events. Television other than drama has exploited the broadcast medium’s continual promise to communicate presence and embodiment; a promise that enfolds and connects its variety across time and geography. Each television form did not stand on its own, but at different times has also been related to other mediums of performance and the ways in which individual identity is perceived in a social and cultural milieu.

Acknowledgements

This article was created as a keynote lecture for the ‘Acting on Television: Analytical Methods and Approaches’ conference, University of Reading, 2016. I am grateful to staff of the Special Collections service of the University of California, Los Angeles for facilitating access to archival documents donated by US TV professionals working in drama in the 1950-1990 period. I also thank staff of the BBC Written Archives Centre, Reading, for assistance in researching BBC TV drama production in the UK.

Bibliography

Allain P and Harvie J (2006) *The Routledge Companion to Theatre & Performance*. London: Routledge.

- Anon. (1947) Television Service. In: *BBC Year Book 1947*. London: BBC, pp.77-80.
- Baron C et al (eds) (2004) *More than a Method: Trends and Traditions in Contemporary Film Performance*. Wayne State University Press.
- Bignell J (2014) The spaces of *The Wednesday Play* (BBC TV 1964–1970): production, technology and style. *Historical Journal of Radio, Film and Television Studies* 34(3): 369-389.
- Brown L (1998) The American networks. In: Smith A (ed.) *Television: An International History*, 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.147-161.
- Butler J (ed.) (1991) *Star Texts: Image and Performance in Film and Television*. Wayne State University Press.
- Butler J (1993) *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. London: Routledge.
- Cantrell T and Hogg C (2016) Returning to an old question: what do television actors do when they act? *Critical Studies in Television* 11(3): 283-298.
- Cantrell T and Hogg C. (eds) (2017) *Acting in British Television*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cantrell T and Hogg C. (eds) (2018) *Exploring Television Acting*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Caughie J (2000) *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism, and British Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chibnall S and McFarlane B (2009) *The British 'B' Film*. London: BFI.
- Cornea C (ed.) (2010) *Genre and Performance: Film and Television*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Dovey J (2000) *Freakshow: First Person Media and Factual Television*. London: Pluto.
- Eco U (1977) Semiotics of theatrical performance. *The Drama Review*, 21, 107-117.

- Ellis J (2014) TV and cinema: what forms of history do we need? In: Mee L and Walker J (eds) *Cinema, Television & History: New Approaches*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, pp.12-24.
- Gitlin T (1983) *Inside Prime Time*. New York: Pantheon.
- Goffman E (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday.
- Hawes W (2002) *Filmed Television Drama, 1952-1958*. Jefferson: McFarland.
- Hewett R (2017) *The Changing Space of Science Fiction Television Acting*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Hilmes M (1990) *Hollywood and Broadcasting: From Radio to Cable*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Hilmes M (2011) *Network Nations: A Transnational History of British and American Broadcasting*. London: Routledge.
- Jenkins H (2006) *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. London: New York University Press.
- Kepley V and Boddy W (1980) From 'Frontal lobes' to the 'Bob-and-Bob' Show: NBC management and programming strategies, 1949-65. In: Balio T (ed.) *Hollywood in the Age of Television*. London: Unwin Hyman, pp.41-89.
- Lehmann H-T (2006) *Postdramatic Theatre* trans. Jürs-Munby K. London: Routledge.
- Lovell A and Kramer P (eds) (1999) *Screen Acting*. London: Routledge.
- MacDonald JF (1990) *One Nation Under Television: The Rise and Decline of Network Television*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall.
- Marc D and Thompson R (1995) *Prime Time, Prime Movers: From I Love Lucy to L.A. Law - America's Greatest TV Shows and the People Who Created Them*. NY: Syracuse University Press.

- Milch D and Clark B (1996) *True Blue: The Real Stories Behind NYPD Blue*. London: Boxtree.
- Mills B (2013) What does it mean to call television ‘cinematic’? In Jacobs J and Peacock S (eds) *Television Aesthetics and Style*. New York: Bloomsbury, pp.57-66.
- Mosely R (2000) ‘Makeover takeover on British television. *Screen* 41(3): 299-314.
- Neale S (2005) Transatlantic ventures and *Robin Hood*. In: Johnson C and Turnock R (eds) *ITV Cultures: Independent Television Over Fifty Years*. Buckingham: Open University Press, pp.73-87.
- Nichols B (1994) *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Paget D (2011) *No Other Way To Tell It: Docudrama on film and television*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Palmer G (2003) *Discipline and Liberty: Television and Governance*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Pearson R (2010) The multiple determinants of television acting. In: Cornea C (ed.) *Genre and Performance: Film and Television*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp.166-183.
- Raesian J (2011) Virtual reality. *The Guardian*, Media, 1 June.
- Schechner R (2002) *Performance Studies*. New York: Routledge.
- Uricchio W (2008), Television’s first seventy-five years: the interpretive flexibility of a medium in transition. In: Kolker R (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Film and Media Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.286-305.
- Wheatley H (2016) *Spectacular Television: Exploring Televisual Pleasure*. London: IB Tauris.

Wood H and Skeggs B (eds) (2011) *Reality Television and Class*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Woods F (2012) Classed femininity, performativity and camp in British structured reality programming. *Television and New Media* 20(10): 1-18.

Worland R (1994) 'The Cold War mannerists: *The Man From U.N.C.L.E* and TV espionage in the 1960s. *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 21(4): 150-161.

Films

Colonel March Investigates. Cy Endfield (1953). Eros Films.

Rear Window. Alfred Hitchcock (1954). Paramount Pictures.

The Time Machine. George Pal (1960). MGM.

The Browning Version. Anthony Asquith (1951). Universal Pictures et al.

Television programmes

Adam Adamant Lives! (1966-67). BBC.

All My Children. (1970-2013). ABC/The Online Network. Creative Horizons/ABC/Prospect Park.

Armchair Theatre. (1956-74). ITV. ABC/Thames Television.

Big Brother. (2000-). Channel 4/Five. Endemol.

Bonanza. (1959-73). NBC et al. NBC.

Brideshead Revisited (1981). ITV. Granada Television.

Britain's Got Talent. (2007-). ITV. Syco Entertainment/Talkback Thames/Thames.

Cathy Come Home. (1966) BBC.

Colonel March of Scotland Yard. (1952). ITV. Official Films.

Columbo. (1971-2003). NBC/ABC. Universal Television.

Coronation Street. (1960-). ITV. Granada Television.

Desperate Scousewives. (2011-12). E4.

Doctor Who. (1963-89). BBC.

EastEnders. (1985-). BBC.

East Side / West Side. (1963-64). CBS. Talent Associates/United Artists.

Fabian of Scotland Yard. (1954-56). BBC.

Frankie Howerd: Rather You Than Me. (2008). BBC.

General Hospital. (1963-). ABC. Selmur Productions/ABC.

Geordie Shore. (2011-). MTV. Lime Pictures.

Get Smart. (1965-70). NBC/CBS. Talent Associates/CBS.

Hancock & Joan. (2008). BBC. World Productions.

Hawaii Five-O. (1968-80). CBS. Leonard Freeman Productions/CBS.

Hill Street Blues. (1981-87). NBC. MTM.

Hollyoaks. (1995-). Channel 4/E4. Lime Pictures.

Hughie Green Most Sincerely. (2008). BBC.

I Love Lucy. (1951-57). CBS. Desilu.

Kenneth Williams: Fantabulosa! (2006). BBC.

Kraft Television Theatre. (1947-58). NBC. J. Walter Thompson/Talent Associates.

Les Sylphides (1946). BBC.

Lux Video Theatre: The Browning Version (1955). NBC.

Made in Britain. (1983). ITV. Central Television.

Made in Chelsea (2011-). E4. Monkey Kingdom.

Modern Art in Stage Design: A Discussion between John Piper and Robert Medley. (1937). BBC.

NYPD Blue. (1993-2006). ABC. Bochco Productions/20th Century Fox.

On Stage. (1946). BBC.

Philco/Goodyear Television Playhouse. (1948-55). NBC.

Play for Today. (1970-84). BBC.

Playhouse 90. (1956-61). CBS. CBS/Filmaster Productions/Screen Gems.

Play of the Month. (1965-83). BBC.

Rossum's Universal Robots. (1938). BBC.

Saber of London. (1957-59). NBC. Danziger Photoplays.

Steptoe and Son. (1962-74). BBC4.

Supernanny. (2004-12). Channel 4. Ricochet Entertainment/Warner Brothers Television.

Survivors. (1975-77). BBC1.

Theatre Night (1985-90). BBC2.

Theatre Parade: scenes from Marigold. (1936). BBC.

The Apprentice. (2004-17). NBC. Trump Productions et al.

The Avengers. (1961-69). ITV. ABC/Thames Television.

The Curse of Steptoe. (2008). BBC4.

The Man from Interpol. (1960). ITV. Danziger Photoplays.

The Man from U.N.C.L.E. (1964-68). NBC. Arena Productions/MGM.

The Only Way is Essex. (2010-). ITV2. Lime Pictures.

The Prisoner. (1967-68). ITV. ITC/Everyman Films.

The Special Relationship. (2010). HBO/BBC.

The US Steel Hour (1953-63). ABC/CBS.

The Wednesday Play. (1964-70). BBC.

Westinghouse Studio One. (1948-58). CBS.

World Television Theatre. (1957-59). BBC.

Z Cars. (1962-78). BBC.